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**WOMAN WHO CAUSED FIRE BY SMOKING NEAR HER OXYGEN TANK,
KILLING HOUSEMATE, PLEADS GUILTY TO MANSLAUGHTER**

A Salem woman who was smoking a cigarette while her oxygen tank was on, causing a rapidly moving fire that killed her housemate, pleaded guilty to manslaughter today in Salem Superior Court and was sentenced to 2½ years in the House of Correction. That sentence is stayed until Wednesday.

Judge David Lowy ordered Deborah Borella, 54, of 179 Boston Street, to serve one year of that sentence, and suspended the balance with probation. Terms of her probation include that she not smoke, that she receive drug treatment and be subject to random screens.

Essex Assistant District Attorney Jessica Connors told the court that had the case proceeded to trial, the Commonwealth would have proved that on March 27, 2004, at 5:30 a.m., Borella was smoking in her bedroom near her oxygen tank, which was on, when a blaze erupted. Borella was able to escape from her bedroom at the front of the house, but Theresa Reynolds, 39, who was asleep in her back bedroom, became trapped in the bathroom of the apartment.

Salem Fire Lt. Erin Griffin entered through the back of the apartment, and unable to see because of the heavy smoke, heroically felt her way into the bathroom and pulled Reynolds out of the house with the help of Salem Police Officer John Andersen.

Reynolds was transported to North Shore Medical Center, but died about an hour later from burns and soot inhalation. Reynolds' husband was rescued by Salem Firefighter Michael O'Donnell. Mr. Reynolds was also taken to North Shore Medical Center, where he was treated for smoke inhalation. Borella's boyfriend alerted an 8 year-old boy who was also staying at the apartment, and both escaped the blaze.

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, "Smoking on home oxygen is not a private matter, but a serious threat to public safety, as this tragic case demonstrates. In the past decade there have been 20 deaths and over 30 serious injuries in Massachusetts from fires and burns started by smoking while home oxygen was in use. I hope that physicians will help their patients who smoke to quit before prescribing home oxygen therapy."

Borella was represented by Attorney Mark Schmidt from the Committee for Public Counsel Services.